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E4

RELEASED IN PART  
B1, 1.4(D)

ACTION AID-00

INFO	LOG-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	WHA-00	SRPP-00	EB-00
	EUR-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00
	AC-00	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OMB-00	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00
	USIE-00	PMB-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	SAS-00	/002W

-----D490E9 232055Z /62

O 231943Z DEC 03  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4322  
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY  
NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
USINT HAVANA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 004424

SENSITIVE

NSC FOR CBARTON  
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/17/2013  
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, PREL, VE, CU, IZ, ZP  
SUBJECT: FIDEL BUTTRESSES HUGO DURING HOLIDAY DROP-BY

CLASSIFIED BY: RICHARD SANDERS, ACTING DCM, FOR REASONS  
1.4(B) AND (D)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) DURING A BRIEF MEETING WITH PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ ON DECEMBER 22, CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO SAID HE IS NOT AFRAID OF A RECALL REFERENDUM AGAINST CHAVEZ, WHOSE SOCIAL PROGRAMS GIVE HIM "INDISPUTABLE" POLITICAL STRENGTH. THE

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: MELVIN E SINK  
DATE/CASE ID: 24 JUN 2004 200400114

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PRESIDENTIAL "WORKING MEETING" TOOK PLACE ON THE VENEZUELAN ISLAND OF LA ORCHILA (NORTHEAST OF CARACAS) AND REPORTEDLY LASTED SEVERAL HOURS. OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE VISIT WAS SCANT, THOUGH CASTRO GRANTED AN EXTENSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE GOVERNMENT TELEVISION STATION IN WHICH HE CRITICIZED THE USG ON THE WAR WITH IRAQ, ET. AL. CASTRO'S MESSAGE WAS ONE OF SUPPORT FOR CHAVEZ, THOUGH WE DOUBT IT WILL HAVE MUCH POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. END SUMMARY.

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MEETING OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MINDS  
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2. (U) ON DECEMBER 22, CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO MET WITH PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ ON THE VENEZUELAN ISLAND OF LA ORCHILA. CHAVEZ HAD INVITED CASTRO DURING THE LATTER'S TELEPHONE CONVERSATION DURING CHAVEZ'S DECEMBER 14 NATIONALLY-BROADCAST "ALO, PRESIDENTE." ON DECEMBER 21, CHAVEZ ANNOUNCED THAT THE CUBAN LEADER HAD ACCEPTED THE INVITATION, THOUGH ONLY FOR A SHORT "WORKING VISIT" OF ONE DAY. THOUGH THE VISIT WAS SHROUDED IN SECRECY, PRESS REPORTS SPECULATE THAT CASTRO ARRIVED ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 21. CASTRO AND CHAVEZ MET FOR SEVERAL HOURS ON DECEMBER 22 BEFORE CASTRO DEPARTED BY CUBANA DE AVIACION PLANE AT 1800 HOURS.

3. (U) IN COMMENTS TO ELEAZAR DIAZ RANGEL, DIRECTOR OF CARACAS PRO-GOV DAILY ULTIMAS NOTICIAS, CASTRO SAID THE MEETING WAS CHARACTERIZED MORE BY "FONDNESS" THAN BY A SPECIFIC POLITICAL SUBJECT. CHAVEZ TOLD REPORTERS LATER THAT THE TWO LEADERS DISCUSSED SOCIAL PROGRAMS BEING CARRIED OUT UNDER THE CUBA-VENEZUELA BILATERAL AGREEMENT, NAMELY, MISSION ROBINSON (LITERACY) AND MISSION BARRIO ADENTRO (MEDICAL SERVICES). CASTRO SAID THAT THE TWO LEADERS' SCHEDULES DID NOT PERMIT A PLANNED TOUR IN VENEZUELA TO OBSERVE THE STATUS OF THESE PROGRAMS. CHAVEZ ALSO TOLD REPORTERS THE TWO LEADERS TALKED ABOUT NEW COOPERATION IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN THEIR COUNTRIES, AND ABOUT "THE PROBLEMS OF WAR."

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CASTRO: NOT AFRAID OF REFERENDUM  
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4. (U) ASKED BY DIAZ RANGEL ABOUT THE POSSIBLE RECALL REFERENDUM AGAINST PRESIDENT CHAVEZ, CASTRO SAID, "I'M NOT THE LEAST BIT AFRAID OF A REFERENDUM, BECAUSE THE PROGRAMS CHAVEZ IS CARRYING OUT HAVE AN ENORMOUS POLITICAL FORCE THAT IS INDISPUTABLE." IN AN EXTENSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE GOVERNMENT TELEVISION STATION, CASTRO CHALLENGED THE WORLD TO

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"SHOW HIM A "MORE GENEROUS MAN THAN THE PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA." CHAVEZ APPEARED AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW AND EMBRACED CASTRO, NOTING THAT IT HAD BEEN "NINE YEARS AND EIGHT DAYS" SINCE THEIR FIRST MEETING WHEN CASTRO RECEIVED CHAVEZ AFTER THE LATTER'S RELEASE FROM PRISON IN 1994.

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CASTRO CRITICIZES THE "UNJUST" WAR IN IRAQ  
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5. (U) CASTRO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE PRESS INTERVIEW, WHICH WAS RE-PLAYED SEVERAL TIMES ON THE GOVERNMENT TELEVISION STATION, TO CRITICIZE THE U.S. WAR IN IRAQ. DISCOUNTING THE PRESENCE OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN IRAQ, CASTRO SAID THERE WAS "NO POSSIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR INVADING IRAQ AND DROP THE BOMBS THAT THEY DROPPED EVEN THOUGH THE WORLD OPPOSED IT. MORE THAN 90 PERCENT OF THE SPANIARDS AND EUROPEANS OPPOSED THE INVASION BECAUSE IT IS THE LAW OF THE

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OPPOSITION VOICES REJECT CASTRO  
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6. (U) MEMBERS OF THE OPPPOSITION CRITICIZED CHAVEZ FOR INVITING CASTRO. BRAVE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (ABP) LEADER ANTONIO LEDEZMA SAID THE VISIT CONFIRMS CHAVEZ'S LINKS WITH INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. MOVEMENT TOWARD SOCIALISM (MAS) LEADER AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY LEOPOLDO PUCHI WONDERED WHAT ADVICE CASTRO COULD OFFER CHAVEZ REGARDING THE RECALL REFERENDUM AS CASTRO HAD IMPEDED POPULAR REFERENDA IN HIS OWN COUNTRY FOR 40 YEARS. LEFT-LEANING OPPPOSITION FIGURE AND "TAL CUAL" EDITOR TEODORO PETKOFF CALLED THE VISIT AN ERROR, NOTING THAT IN THE MIDST OF AN ELECTORAL STRUGGLE, CHAVEZ REAFFIRMED HIS LINKS WITH "AN EXPIRED POLITICAL MODEL" THAT LACKS DEMOCRATIC RULE AND ULTIMATELY DISREGARDS HUMAN LIFE.

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COMMENT  
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